

BOOK REVIEW

WILLIAM C. BURGER. 2006. **Flowers: How they Changed the World.** (ISBN 1-59102-407-2, hbk.). Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, NY 14228-2197, U.S.A. (**Orders:** 716-691-0133, 716-691-0137 fax, <http://www.prometheusbooks.com/>). \$23.00, 337 pp., b&w figures, color photographs, glossary, and notes, 5" × 7".

William Burger has written a book that is hard to put down. *Flowers: How they Changed the World* is a fantastic introduction to the angiosperms, their evolutionary advances, and the roles plants play in the evolutionary history of man. This book is written in such a way that it will appeal to those readers looking for an introduction to flowering plants. However, it also provides the seasoned readers much food for thought. The writing style is very casual and conversational with a good deal of wit, yet includes an abundance of information. The book covers many topics including: what is a flower, the purpose of flowers, flower friends, flower enemies, how to distinguish flowering plants, what makes flowering plants special. It also discusses how primates, people and flowering plants relate to each other and in the end how flowers changed the world. Topics flow well into each other, which greatly adds to the readability of the text.

The author is clever about introducing new subjects and making these topics non-threatening. For example, the book starts with introductions to four plants, a geranium, rose and two lilies. The author hints at the importance of distinguishing traits between monocotyledons and dicotyledons, but doesn't delve into more detail until later chapters; smartly building on these unassuming introductions made in the first chapter. This book contains well-written discussions and a wonderful introduction to major evolutionary advances in plant reproductive biology. Among these are how pollen helped flowering plants do well on land, the value of deciduous leaves, the biology related to losing leaves from a plant, and the evolutionary advances in plant defenses of chemicals that help prevent herbivory and disease. The author includes many other interesting discussions on subjects such as the importance of out-breeding in plants and how plants have adapted ways to promote out-breeding, as well as the diversity in form and structure of flowering plants. The book's final chapters cover information on how plants have been important to people, focusing on mankind's development of agriculture and the importance of biodiversity to our lives and the Earth. There is also a section that summarizes the important role plants have played in creating our world and the modern lives of man in ten major stages.

Flowers: How they Changed the World by William Burger is an extraordinary and interesting book to read; full of engaging information for readers of all ages, educational backgrounds and interests. The text is written in an easygoing style and covers a wide range of topics related to the evolution and biology of flowering plants. The author has also gone above and beyond typical notes for the reader; he provides both information and references for each chapter topic accented by his own educated valuable comments.—Lee Luckeydoo, Herbarium, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 509 Pecan Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4060, U.S.A.